Depot Town Rag

FREE 100% RAG CONTENT

JULY 1984 MEETINGS

Merchants - July 12 - 7:30
Association - July 19 - 7:30
Foundation - July 26 - 8:00
...all in the Caboose

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

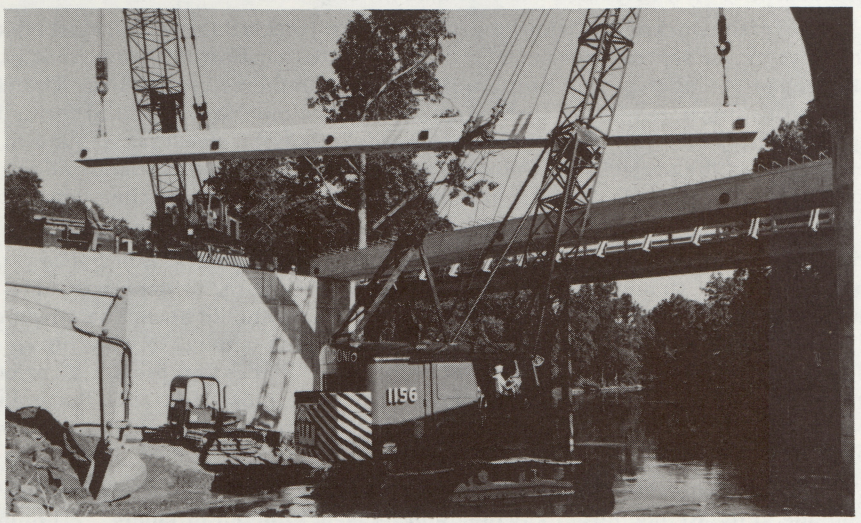
OLD BRIDGE FINALLY GIVES UP --

Beams For New Bridge Arrive to Cover West Span
June report by Denis Schmidedeke

In constructing the west pier group of the new bridge, workers encountered a disturbed river bottom from the previous construction of the old 1910 bridge. This gave our heroes from Greenfield Construction Company fits in building this assembly of columns and arched cap in a timely manner. Their cofferdam had difficulties keeping out water. Blue clay from Allen Park was trucked in to seal the exterior perimeter of the corrugated steel enclosure. Although causing little difficulty, a continuous edge of a 1910 cofferdam was also unearthed. This early construction consisted of rough sawn oak planks with curved and chamfered bottom edges to knife into river bed sand and soil. The elegance of such early construction techniques impressed Larry Gilbert, superintendent for Greenfield Construction.

Over on the west bank, repetitive operations, day after day, went on to backfill the hugh concrete abutment walls to the bank with sand. What took so long was a state requirement to fill and compact it in layers of only nine inches high to a density of 95 per cent solidity.

After what seemed like a slow month of little progress, one day of dramatic activity thrilled patient bridge watchers. Seventeen huge box-beams arrived before month's end, as forecast by this chronicler last month. Like some monstrous futuristic circus, twelve enormous beams arrived in town on Wednesday evening, June 27, on 90 foot long trucks, or so it seemed, for the 80 foot long beams themselves became a linking component of their own transport. They were driven from Kalamazoo earlier in the day and, upon their arrival, were parked end-to-end along the east side of North Huron from the bridge to the Masonic Temple at Pearl Street.



Soon after sunrise the next day, the first beam was placed, without incident, but with due care and assured purpose. One by one, they were lifted from their transport by both large cranes, each lifting an end. The truck crane (with wheels and tires) was stabilized at the brink and atop the north side of the west abutment, while the crawler crane (with the steel link tracks) did its work from various positions out in the river.

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BOOMER BUST?

Just a few years ago Depot Towners put together a concept which recognized the bums,tramps and hobos who inhabiated the railyards of depression - riden America. Other communities were embarrassed by such activity, but we all knew that this level of 'low life' lived in Ypsilanti's Depot Town, as well as every other railroad district throughout the country. We decided to enjoy our past and revel in it. Depot Town is always ready for a party, and a Boomer celebration was just another excuse for a neighborhood get-together.

Some of the Boomer attributes we celebrated over the years included THE BUMS' RUSH, which saw young and old alike, panhandeling their way from the Water Tower to the safety of the railraod district; a MULLIGAN STEW COOK-OUT, where hoppins and gumps were served to the multitude; an area-wide TALENT SHOW which gave away hundreds of dollars worth of prizes to talented musicians, storytellers and dancers; TRACK-WALKING contests, COSTUME EVENTS and the HOBO KING AND QUEEN event, where neighbors put pennies in pots around the block to vote for their favorite personalities. Last year saw River Art Works' Jeff White and fourhundred-year-old Emma Hall escorted around the city in the back of a pick-up truck wearing cardboard crowns. All the local papers picked up the event and printed a photo of the proud couple.

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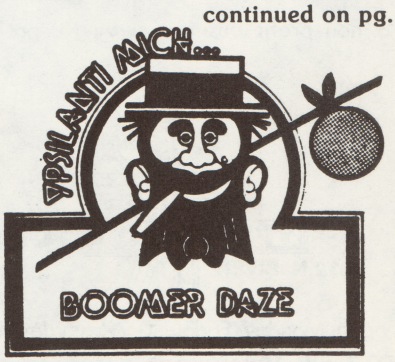

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What has happened to all this friendly neighborhood hoopla this year? We have been asked repeatedly if this annual event is going to continue. Last year's event was planned entirely by the merchants' committee, but they have not met recently and no plans were forthcoming from that group. The folks who put in a whole weekend for the Frog Island Jazz Festival weren't about to take on another project. Seems that Boomer Days won't happen this year, and it's unfortunate.

Could it be that business wasn't as bad as some folks predicted with the bridge being down and continuous promotion was not as necessary as previously thought? Or could it be that everybody else was going to make this promotional event happen and that such accomplishments are automatic and annual?

Whatever the reason (and there could be others not listed here) it is unfortunate that so unique a celebration is not happening this year. We hope the celebration of that more sordid part of our neighborhood history will resurface again soon. After all, our local history is not all ensconced in those neat little folders in the Ypsilanti Historical Museum. Some of it was rowdy and profane. Certainly we saw much of it in Depot Town. We seem to have had a good time letting people know that we were not always so polite and boringly middle-class. Let's not get too fancy and forget those halcyon days of the Boomers. It was a fun few years when all the neighborhood kids dressed up like bums and played on the sidewalks of Depot Town. We hope to see them again soon. If not this summer, maybe next year?

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forgotten," he observes, is the human backside. Not only should there be enough places to sit, the places should be comfortable; benches with backrests and chairs with well-contoured seats. *(Note the sitters on the concrete planters every day. They are almost as popular as the contoured park benches.)*

In trying to explain why some public urban areas attract people and other repel them Whyte says the presence of sunlight mattered mainly in chilly weather. The elegance and purity of the design did not seem to matter; people sitting in plazas seldom took notice. Shape of the space was also ruled out, as was the amount of space available to each person. In some cases, the more space that was available, the less people used it. *(Our market plaza changes drastically from Saturday to Saturday, with a variety of creative uses between market days, as well.)*

Whyte also found that although people say that they want to avoid crowds, most actually seek them out. The most frequently used plazas are sociable places, where people arrange to meet, sit and talk. They typically choose to sit and stand in the mainstream of pedestrian traffic. *(Being only a block long, there's not much place to go in Depot Town, except around the corner.)*

Whyte found several additional elements that encouraged plaza activity; the presence of food vendors, trees, water (pools, waterfalls or fountains) *(a river, in our case)*, a natural route between the street and the plaza, clear line of sight to and from the street and some stimulus to provide a focus of conversation (the view, a striking piece of sculpture or entertainers,) *(watching the amtrak and conrail action is always popular).* All these things make public places "friendlier," Whyte says.

People get a sense of security, which all humans need, from the proper management of public space and from the presence of other people, not necessarily from the high-tech monitoring and visible security personnel that predominate in so many urban megastructures. *(Few can tell who is on 'security' at the block's Jazz Concerts. Perhaps it is because they are secure.)*

Appropriately designed and carefully located signs also create a sense of security. A firsttime visitor is subtly reassured by signs that indiate the location of services, routes around the site and exits. A P.P.S. study showed that visitors asked more questions about the site itself and fewer about services after well-designed signs were added. *(New signs at Huron, Forest and Michigan were a start. Watch for the new city signs for traffic routing and parking information to follow later this summer.)*

Comfort is often a function of how long a person is likely to be in one of these spaces. The steps of the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan might be comfortable enough to sit on while waiting for a friend, but they might not do for an entire afternoon of sitting. Availablility and placement of toilet facilities are an important consideration, too. *(The placement of port a johns at the larger events in our block is no accident.)*

They believe that, for many people and especially for children, a sense of discovery can make a space more usable. The Cannery in San Francisco, for example, provides visitors with an opportunity to investigate the interior of an old factory and watch the different things that others do while exploring. *(Our gnarled, old tree in Marketplace seems to do as well as most shopping centers' community scupltures.)*

Typical of the work and passion for detail in the projects is Faneuil Hall Marketplace, which works for several reasons. First, it is located on Boston's waterfront at the intersection of Congress and State, a traditional commerce crossroads. The city's sense of history is reinforced with adaptations of colonial architectural forms that highlight the past while serving modern needs. Sensual pleasures abound in the centerpiece of the project, the Quincy Market buildings. Smells, sounds and sights from the butcher shops to the outdoor vendors mingle in a constantly changing pattern.

There is a sense of openness, both in the market buildings themselves and in the orientation of the whole marketplace to the center but the openness is designed to offer choice. "Places should invite people to linger, to explore, to decide to take this pathway or that Benjamin Thompson explains. "There should always be an element of mystery, the possibility of surprise." This dimension (similar to what others call "discovery") helps people to make use of the space. "Places that provide a variety of spaces, activities and intensities to choose from are those that spur the greatest sociability," Jane Thompson concludes. "Choice is the psychological equivalent of control."

"While the Boston Marketplace belongs to the genre of marketplaces everywhere, it is unique in its architecture, its people and its New England products." Thompson says. *(We find it just as easy to say 'yes' to Michigan's products at the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market and all over Depot Town.)*

To create a sense of place in public spaces, says Benjamin Thompson, the country needs architects, psychologists and planners who will create places worth remembering--and worth loving. *(Such a loving environment also needs to be filled with lovers. And we certainly have them in Depot Town.)*

FESTIVAL STILL NEEDS YOUR HELP

There is little you can do to help Larry finish the new Cross Street Bridge on time, but, as someone pointed out last week, it's never open during the festival anyway. There is plenty to do, however, to get the block ready for the nearly quarter of a million people expected this year. Every business is preparing for their own display in front of their address and many are paying attention to the other nearby attrributes such as planting, weeding, painting and generally putting on a good face to the maddening hordes of our much admiring public.

The following items deserve some of your attention this month in order for them to happen with the greatest ease and grace. Let those listed below know of your willingness to help.

1. COSTUME CONTEST -- Linda Williams, Vintage Passion

2. ANTIQUE AUTO SHOW -- Carolyn McKeever, above Now and Then

3. JAZZ TENT--bartending-Rex Ritchie Miller's Ice Cream Parlor, music setups-Jim Dulzo, stage, lights, sound - Randy Carpenter

4. FREIGHT HOUSE EVENTS -- Jerry Meadows, c/o The Deli Shoppe

5. FARMERS MARKET -- Gary Urick, City Hall or in the Market

And, for just a taste of what the overall planning is like for this stupendous event, attend one of the every-Thursday afternoon meetings with Rex Richie at the Chamber of Commerce office at 3:00 PM.

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NATHALIE NEEDS A DIFFERENT KIND OF HELP

Oh, sure, when we heard that Festival Chair Nathalie Edmunds broke her leg in two places we got in on the joke, too. "Sue them both!" we said. But when we visited her recently, we soon saw that this was no joking matter. It's a most serious break and will likely be felt by Nat for the rest of her life. She may not even walk in a cast for several weeks and then must be most careful of how she uses it. Meantime, Dale Hooker is taking over for Nat at the Festival planning table and Nat's well organized committees will do their best without her. Wouldn't you know it? Right after Nathalie receives her award from that Democratic Governor for being Ypsilanti's hostess with the mostess, she has to take a back seat to her committees? Let her know you appreciate her and miss her, but most of all, let her know that the Festival will carry on and succeed only because of her excellent leadership in the past.

UNIQUE FOUNDATION EVENT AT HERITAGE FEST

Jerry Meadows, a.k.a. Professor Malarkey, is taking the responsibility for planning the week end-long events to be held in the Freight House during the August Heritage Festival. Meadows and his committee have recieved donations from local businesses and property owners to support the first-time event in the grandest old-time fashion. Heading the building-wide activity are the GREAT TRAIN AND ANTIQUE TOY SHOW AND SALE and the ALL-AMERICAN QUILT EXPOSITION. Also on the bill for the tourist-packed weekend are continuous (free) old time movies which will include the premiere showing of the Steam Train film made by an old adquaintance of the professor's. MAGIC LANTERN slide shows will include East Sider Linda Hummel's documentary of the Cross Street Bridge and the Depot Town production of a year ago entitled "A Victorian Store Front is Missing".

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By noon, all but three of the 17 hollow box/plank beams were in place to give the gallery of spectators, strewn out along the handrail of the temporary footbridge, a good show of contemporary bridge building. One after another the beams were placed almost in rythmic sequence, suggestive of a well-rehearsed performance. Each beam, weighing nearly 27 tons, appeared to glide into place by the skillful duet and coordinated effort of the crane operators. Synchronously, they swung each behemoth out over the river and lowered it gently to rest forever upon neoprene bearing pads atop the arched pier cap. So smooth did all go well to appear natural and easy as if no other way could be possible.

Such efficiency and coordination, however, was no accident and is largely attributable to the ingenuity, experience and sagacity of Greenfield's Larry Gilbert. Larry made models of the cranes and a typical beam to place over and move around on a special plan he drew of the west abutment and pier group. Thus was he aided to simulate events to come and develop the strategy to make them work so well.

By two o'clock all beams were set, long before many could catch this act in the drama unfolding. A week or so will pass, however, before the next is scheduled to occur. Much preparation must be made and construction completed on the approach ramp to the west span to elevate the roadway to the height of the box-beams. Further structrual enhancement of the west deck span must be made to support and allow the truck crane and future delivery trucks with beams to repeat their act from atop this first span built. Then the middle span will be set followed by the last, all being done from a west-to-east flow of completion.

The structual enhancement of each span, after its complement of 17 hollow box beam planks are placed on abutment walls and pier caps, is a highly sophisticated operation of contemporary bridge design, theory and engineering. For the deck of each span to act as an integral whole, instead of deflecting in strips along each beam, all beams of a span must be locked together to form a unitized assembly. Thus, an imparted moving load on one beam is shared and borne by several on each side of it. This homeogeneity is achieved by grouting the east/west gaps between beams and squeezing the assembly after the grout is hardened. Six high strength steel braided cables will be threaded through aligned holes in the sides of the beams. Powerful hydraulic jacks will stretch the braided cables to a specified high stress, and mechanical fasteners affixed to each end will maintain this tension. These fasteners will be encased in six pockets preformed into the sides of each north and south edge beam. To further assure that the tension will be maintained throughout the life of the bridge, the transverse holes containing the cables will be pressure-grouted through threaded pipes cast into the tops of the beams and aligned with the transverse holes containing the braided cables. The cables will remain forever taunt, squeezing the beams together to structually act as one rigid slab 33 inches thick, by friction and tensile force, across each span for hundreds, if not thousands, of years to come.

(bridge architecture, text and photo by the writer, Denis Schmiedeke)

21 JUNE D. T. A.

Vice President Gary McKeever opened the meeting at 7:30 P.M. in the absence of president Rex Richie.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as read.

The treasurer reported our assets at $3216.64 with $2737.36 in the General Fund, $30.48 in the Rag account and $448.80 in the concessions account (jazz).

FOUNDATION: Eric Ward reported the passage of the proposed Downtown Development Authority for Depot Town and that Mayor Murdock will probably appoint that authority's board at the next City Council meeting.

JAZZ: Frog Island tents will go up Friday; we are sharing expenses for many of the physical items with the Greater Ypsilanti Civitan Club who will sponsor a Bluegrass Festival on the Sunday following Frog Island Jazz.

MERCHANTS: Only two merchants attended the last meeting. Boomer Days will probably not happen this year. New directional signs into the district have been effective. Discussed the need for standardized hours and openings and closings.

THE RAG Many of our ads are not paid up and July publication may be late due to the fact that we are broke again. These are not advertisers in the true sense,but sponsors of the neighborhood's monthly newsletter. They are much appreciated.

Wayne Sprygaea volunteered to act as liason and catalyst with the Merchants' Committee. Much discussion followed about hours, regularity, promotional events.

Adjourned at 8:10 P.M.

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THIRD FROG ISLAND JAZZ FEST DELIVERS

More than twenty-five-hundred jazz buffs turned out for a pleasant summer day's listening and appreciating when WEMU and DTA put together yet another excellent day of contemporary and traditional jazz in Ypsilanti's least-known city park. Both the Ypsilanti Press and the Ann Arbor News previewed the event in feature-length articles and followed-up with reviews and reports of the much-critiqued event. Hundreds of volunteers from both the radio station and neighborhood drew many music lovers to the block and the crowd overflowed the enormous parking space next to the island.

City Councilmember John Van Bolt reported tired concert-goers taking a leak on his picket fence on their way to parked cars on North Huron Street but said it was worth the free concert from his back deck all day long. Such neighborliness stretched across the Huron River on more than one occasion during this first class artisitic weekend. We who work the 'security' end of these events are always impressed with how helpful and pleasant most folks are at these enormous undertakings. Seems our few unpleasant people at this function were from the bands (and they were getting paid for it), but even most of the musicians were appreciative of the fine audience we brought to them.

As with every such event, the committee heads wonder at publishing a list of their many volunteers who made it all happen, but such a list would certainly leave out some loyal workers who are always taken for granted. One thing this block does take for granted is the fact that many will turn out to make these kinds of celebrations happen. Musicians and jazz lovers from all over the State agree that this event is a showcase for the best music of its kind in the area. One testimonial to that fact was the excellent follow-up music upstairs at Aubree's Saloon the same evening. Merchants all up and down the block testified to the same ethic: There was a great deal of action on the block due to the hugh and happy crowds at the Frog Island Jazz Festival.

BLUEGRASS GETS STARTED

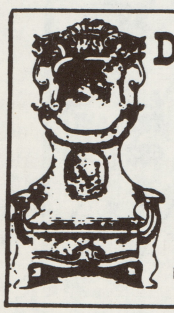
The Greater Ypsilanti Civitan Club attended the last four-months of planning meetings for the Frog Island Jazz Fest and followed up with a Bluegrass Concert the following day. They shared expenses with WEMU/DTA for such items as porta-johns, tent, stage, sound and lights. Although they did not enjoy the same kind of attendance record as the Saturday Jazz event, they are heartened at their own event's response and hope to continue next year. We only wish we had a 'big brother/sister' to help us into jazz entreprenurealism. We look forward to co-oping another weekend next year. What about a split poster which touts the events simultaneously?

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATED AT MARKET

Country Ken Croff usually entertains the rest of the community along with "Cousin Linda"at their Saturday morning music sessions in the Farmers' Market Coffee Shop, but last month the tables were turned on Ken when family, friends, and farmers got together to honor his birthday. Janice Carpo made a beautiful birthday cake in the shape of a guitar and gifts and cards were offered up by the Market Vendors. Estelle Sutherland thanks all the folks who helped to make this such a happy ocassion. The morning Market crowd is always greeted warmly by Coffee Shop hostess Estelle, but on this day it was even more special. Happy Birthday, Ken, from all your Depot Town admirers.

Depot Town Rag

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc., a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.



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DEPOT TOWN STINKS...

or smells.. (Have you ever noticed how our language has so few positive words for smells? "Aroma" is o.k., but "odor" and "stink" are much more common. The accompanying article suggest SMELLS as an appropriate segment of a lovable urban environment. We followed our noses through Depot Town the other day and recorded the following observations. See how many you can match with their point of origin.

Car wax
Mozarella cheese
Turpentine
Lacquer
Musty books
Wildroot
Seaweed
Deisel fumes
Stale beer
Popcorn
Mothballs
Wheat Germ
Newsprint
Potato Soup
Chocolate
Coffee
Printer's Ink
Talcum Powder
Shampoo
Hot Fudge
Handmade soap

Miller's Ice Cream
Shear Genius
Standard Printing
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Health Emporium
Candy Shop
Sidetrack
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MAKING CITY SPACES LOVABLE PLACES

(How Lovable is Ypsilanti's Depot Town?)

(The following article is made of excerpts from Carol Levine's publication in the June issue of Psychology Today. The added italics are ours, calling attention to those amenities in our own neighborhood.)

Everything we know about animals suggests that they belong to a place, says urban planner and landscape architect Ian McHarg. "But this has not been true of Modern architecture," he says. "There we simply eliminated difference and emphasized unity, conformity and universality." Yet, there is a positive side to the all-too-familiar grimness. Uniformity and sterility pervade the public areas of so many American cities.

The idea that people are emotionally attached to certain places is hardly new. *(We at 'The Rag' are accused of that often. Almost everyone who comes to Depot Town claims to own the place.)*

Central to the problem of designing workable public spaces is the question of what people find useful and comfortable.

According to Yi-Fu Tuan, our senses of vision, touch, hearing and--perhaps least recognized--smell all have the power to call up emotionally charged memories of childhood scenes and places. *(See the accompanying article and smell test.)*

A person with a highly developed spatial sense, for example, will tend to see a place in its entirety rather than as a collection of elements; a highly verbal person will be able to articulate the details of scenes and places.

Tuan suggests, in addition, that visitors and natives perceive places differently. The visitor brings enthusiasm and a fresh perspective to a novel scene *(just listen to the Saturday shoppers, discovering the block for the first time);* the native sees daily life, which may be unrewarding and difficult. The native, however, may have an emotional attachment to a place precisely because it is so familiar, while the visitor sees nothing of personal value. *(Maybe that's why our monthly D.T.A. meetings are so emotional?)*

Structures that stimulate all the senses--medieval cathedrals, for instance, with the color of stained glass, the scent of burning incense and the tactile firmness of wooden pews--are more likely to evoke an emotional response than are structures, such as modern skyscrapers, that depend mainly on visual impact. *)How about a railroad at one end and a river at the other? Is that stimulating enough?)*

Places rich in detail that are adapting and evolving contribute most to identify formation. Even places without character play a role; they offer anonymity to people confronting turning points in their lives. *(Many still tell about how much they loved this place even in the 'bad old days'.)*

No one can (or probably even wants to) remake whole cities, but many projects are being designed to revamp parts of cities--residential neighborhoods, downtown shopping areas, buildings and plazas.

William "Holly"Whyte says, "People tend to sit most where there are places to sit." While he concedes that this finding is hardly an intellectural tour-de-force, it is evidence of a failing in much urban design; "A dimension that architects seem to have

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RIVER ARTWORKS
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PACKMAN DIGS THE WHISTLE STOPS

By Robert L. Fox

Many towns, small and large, have beautiful train stations, just as we do here in Depot Town. Traveling as Packman, the World's oneofakind C.B. hitch-hiker, I had occasion to visit old depots in states across the south. Of particular interest are the various uses one sees for these old stations.

When the 1982 World's Fair opened in Knoxville, it had been constructed in an aging downtown railyard near the river. Located at one end of the site is the magnificent Louisville & Nashville station. Restored for the fair, today it houses two excellent restaurants: the L & N Station and Ruby Tuesday's.

While some railroad terminals have become restaurants, like the Ann Arbor and Knoxville depots, most have a simpler function. Many are only for storage, as is the case with both of the Leesburg, Florida stations. Rarely, however, is an old whistle stop completely unused.

I liked the arrangement in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where a gift shop and a framing shop share the building with the Chamber of Commerce. This marriage of uses is enhanced by being a stop on a special Amtrak run from Mobile, Alabama to the 1984 Worlds' Fair in New Orleans. There is plenty of parking and a built-in visitor's center.

So it brings tears to my eyes when I look at our depot, the living center of our district, suffering from a lack of what we here in Depot Town are so good at. The Deopt Town with a business in every store front, resident landlords, new street and sidewalks, a great jazz series, the caboose, a farmers' market, and everything being used for something-except the depot! Currently it sits unused, with the doors kicked-in and totally at the mercy of the vandal's wrath! What are we going to do? Sit on our brains until someone burns it down?

Not me! If I've learned something touring whistle stops, the first most important step is preserving a depot, or any other structure, is putting it to good use. And if I've learned something else: it's that the most difficult and expensive transformation of a train station is to a restaurant. Let's be realistic! Perhaps a train station/restaurant for Depot Town is too ambitious. Would the building look the same? Think about it, railroaders: another bar and eatery in this area? Do we need it? Can we support it?

I like the Ocean Springs approach with the two shops and the Chamber of Commerce. It's a popular attraction that serves the needs of the community while generating rental income. What's more, they took a cost-effective approach. Very few changes were needed to make the old building useful.

So. . . "Hello folks. What cha think? Check it out! Let's put the place to use. Packman said that. So long!

While Bob (Packman) Fox was hitching South last spring our Depot continued to languish. The developers were so slow in putting together their plan for the building that one of the largest financial backers, the National Bank of Ypsilanti, pulled out their support from the plan. ed.

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